

WHEN SITE LOST THE PLOT

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Nick Ferguson

Speedscaping

I've been working on this project together with another artist, Richard Beard, for a year or so, and it begins with these lorry trailers parked in fields next to the motorway, which we've thought about for a while, and have now come back to as the subject for a piece of work. There are lots of them out there, you see them at speed—it's impossible to slow down without risking an accident—and you're invited to either advertise on one or to buy something.

We have started photographing the trailers and documenting some of the places where they are. I'm interested in their uncertain nature—they seem to be neither part of the local infrastructure that surrounds them, nor quite part of the road. They're not vernacular in their architecture, and though they belong to the road, they are on the wrong side of the barrier and are not normally roadworthy. They're also mass produced objects, they're mobile, and their relationship to the land seems, to borrow the term used earlier, trivial—they could be anywhere, and yet not quite—they do have to be by the road and they have to be on a hill and in the motorist's line of sight. But there's, nevertheless, something about them that makes them distinct from other kinds of architectural structures.

We've also looked at the ways in which they have been talked about—particularly the idea that they are one thing pretending to be another. And we started to find these different threads from debates in the House of Lords. It seemed curious that the issue of advertising on the highway has been taken incredibly seriously—and particularly adverts pretending to be vehicles on their way somewhere, but actually not so. In one exchange the Labour Lord, Lord Sheldon, says, 'For the first time supporting the noble lord, Lord Harrison, the roadside adverts can spoil the scenery'. This idea of spoiling the scenery seems to be an important argument used to lobby for their removal—that and disrupting the attention of drivers. That particular debate was in 2004, and then they didn't seem to crop up for a while; then they reappeared in 2010, when the Lords started arguing about whether they were legal or not and whether or not they were more dangerous than other sorts of signage. In one exchange we read:

LADY SALTOUN OF ABERNETHY: My Lords, does the Minister agree that it is not the illegal advertisements that are dangerous and distracting to drivers—because a good driver pays no attention to them? Rather, it is the totally unnecessary and frivolous legal notices, which say things like ‘Please drive carefully’ in lettering a little too small to be easily read.

I think this question of distraction is an important one. If an advertisement on the back of a bus is not considered a distraction, why is one that is on a lorry in a field? What this discrepancy would seem to point to is the extent to which the objection to them is ideological. What I mean is that it has to do with expectations about what the countryside is for.

Brunel University did a study of them and they argued that there was a 20 percent increase in road accidents where there was a visual distraction, and that was done in 2008. And then 2010 that was discredited, actually further on in that transcript I cited, that very study was brought up and shown to be flawed, hence the Honorable Lady was saying, ‘well, let them get on with it’.

So all sorts of likes and dislikes and personal hates and petty things seem to have come to the surface through discussion of these signs. And then another interesting point arose in the debate:

Surely at a time of recession, with a government committed to encouraging free enterprise and reducing regulation, this cannot be a priority.

In other words, the peer is talking about not removing them. Doing nothing. Just letting them be—so there’s a kind of neoliberal argument here: they can make some money. This is something that can happen out of nothing—out of a piece of dead land—so long as the government does nothing.

We also became interested in how these objects have brought about unlikely alliances between different groups of people: in their petitions to local authorities and in the comments sections of online media, the Liberty and Livelihood group suddenly find themselves in alliance with the Highways Agency, two absolutely ideologically opposed groups both wanting these trailers to be got rid of. And parliamentarians on both sides of the house. Some people I’ve started talking to about them have told me they’ve never noticed them, maybe because they

don't drive, or don't drive round the M25, or perhaps they drive and they just don't see them because the trailers have just become normalised in some way.

We started to think about them as a potential as a space for art, and as I said, that is when we began taking the photos. But we found them incredibly difficult to capture—other vehicles kept getting in the way, or I was too slow with the camera, and this made us conscious of the particular conditions of looking at these things that you can't slow down to see. We tried stopping on the hard shoulder at one site. One of us put the bonnet up while the other got some pictures. But you couldn't relax and concentrate while lorries were thundering past so close, so the pictures weren't any good. This got us thinking about another point: The kind of spectatorship called for by these structures is antithetical to that solicited by the gallery, where you can stand in front of something and take as long as you like. Your experience of seeing them while driving is also frustrated by the fact that they are either too far away to see in detail, because they are a long way ahead; or out of focus because they are in your peripheral area of vision—you are concentrating on the road ahead and they are to the side of you. And there is also this effect where, just when they get close enough for you to see them, they disappear out of view to the side of you, unless you turn your head round to look as you go past.

I became interested in the experience of the view from the motorway because the motorway is already a kind of privileged space within music, literature and art. There's J.G. Ballard's *Concrete Island*, where these people get stranded on a bit of land by the motorway and form a community there. Also Chris Petit and Iain Sinclair did a piece called *London Orbital*; there's Kraftwerk too of course, and Julian Opie made some motorway paintings showing how beautiful and open free it is. The interesting quality for me though is this privileging of a landscape that is difficult to get decent images of.

We were also keen to find out a bit more about the relationship between the commuter and the adjacent territory, and to open up a discussion of the land adjacent to the road, how it's partitioned off into a different space, and how it gets interpreted by people as they pass by on the highway. Then that raised practical questions: If we're going to work with it, how do we get a work made, how do we go about this, and how do we cope with the scale? Also: where are these things exactly?



Then we realized that these questions—how it's interpreted and how you get it made—are part of the same discussion, not separate questions: What does one have to do to get health and safety bodies to approve a proposal to use one of these as a site for art? How would you do that, because if you make it too bold everyone will notice it and it will run into those same problems I've described. So we had this idea of making these constraints the theme of the work, and exploring how we might satisfy the expectations of the various factions that would want a say. But we also wanted the work to respond to the conditions of seeing that I've spoken about, and how frustrating it can be to try to look at the things as a motorist.

We wanted to convey that idea that accessing the landscape—by walking and even by looking—is somehow designed out of what is possible for the motorist. So we worked on an idea to paint out the trailer—to paint it over with the image of what was behind it in the manner of a *trompe l'oeil*. But I'll come back to this in a minute.

We started visiting one of the sites, using Google Maps to locate it. Of course there's a politics of the map, and what the Google van sees is not what you can see as a motorist: the camera is very high up and passes by just after sunrise on a summer's morning, so you get an idea of the motorway as a clear, open space, with an unbroken landscape unfolding before you. Then you go there in your car and you can't see the thing, it's all in the trees or it's behind a lorry or



sound barrier fencing. It was also incredibly difficult to find the trailer once on foot, and reach it and actually walk round it. Just to drive to an access point from the motorway, you had to go on miles to the next junction and then go back on yourself. Then you'd have to walk across fields. At one entrance there was a sign that said 'Bull in Field' (even though there clearly wasn't one), and there were giant tractor tyres across the gateway. We thought these were all measures to deter travellers. At another entrance point you had to skirt round the edge of a motorway slip road which when you are walking round it you realize is actually pretty enormous. And because it isn't part of a footpath there were brambles and a stream and barbed wire fences. There seems to be a link between the inability to see the trailers properly and the inability to access them easily.

Here are some photos from our attempt to get to one of them and of the site when we finally got there. The first is Longford II Landfill site. It's a field which is totally cut off from other agricultural spaces, which is interesting in itself. There's a big recycling plant on one side, there's the motorway on the other—it's between junction 14 and 15 on the M25, and it's about 700m from the end of Heathrow's north runway, directly under the flightpath. You can't hear yourself shout as the planes go over. There is also a disused railway up one edge of it that is now the route of a gas pipeline. In fact, the field may cease to be there at all before too long as one of the proposed third runways would be over this site. And there are railway workers' cottages adjacent to the field.



Anyway, as I was saying, we thought of doing something with these objects/images, and this raised two or three questions: firstly, what does a commuter—either a motorist or a railway passenger expect to see when passing through the countryside? That was our first question. Where does the countryside's function (as advertising space, or as a space for art) sit within the longer history of England's changing land use? We started thinking about the way that the road has transformed the countryside that is near it. The process recalls other historic changes such as the enclosure of land for pasture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in relation to questions of access. Only then, enclosure suited the landowner, whereas now, when the land is cut off from the farm or other facilities, it may not. We wondered: Are these trailers rightly regarded as contemporary examples of a longstanding tendency of the land owner to exploit their territory for monetary gain at the expense of a wider public? Or should we see them as an attempt on the part of marginalized farmers whose land has been rendered unusable, to make the best of it? Is using farmland for advertising an example of diversification? Then the last question was, how might their appropriation as art modify any interpretation that had been made? What happens if you were to think, well, it's not all right for advertising, but it is all right for public art?

We therefore thought of a project which would suit the advocacy of anybody who takes interest in those kinds of spaces. So that would include those who would condemn them as unsightly, exploitative, hazardous, and unethical because they evade planning law. (I'd forgotten to mention: It's very hard for local authorities to get rid of the trailers because they're not fixed structures, so they don't contravene planning law.) But then what about those who see them as opportunistic in some way, like us, that's how we see them—interest groups such as the landowner themselves, the advertising agency who owns the trailer. Interestingly enough, the advertising agency who owns this and many more around the M25 is called Clearview. There's just a mobile phone number on the website for them, so you can't go into an office and meet with these people, but you can advertise with them. Then there are local community groups, and then of course the commuter—in Iain Sinclair's film, they talk about the undead commuter circulating around the M25 in a state of numbness, detached from everything—and then the Highways Agency, the Countryside Alliance, aviation groups, protest groups, that kind of thing.

Longford II was the first site we started looking at. We realized very quickly that it would be hard to get access at all to the site, because as well as all the difficulties I've mentioned, every few metres there are these methane release structures because it's been used for biodegradable landfill. There are signs everywhere saying not to light cigarettes within ten metres of an outlet because there can be explosions, so that became a problem. One more twist to the plot is that the land may well be owned by the government, so Clearview have said to the environmental agency that is managing that piece of land—which is a special piece of land because it's got potentially explosive ground effectively, with gas coming up from within it—they've said to them, to this organization that manage it, can we pay you rent and place an ad on it? So they've placed a trailer there. So the government may be the landlord who is breaking the law.

So, to return to our proposal, we became interested in what would happen if we painted it out: Would the Highways Agency object to that? What would be the objection to a work which, in effect, framed the landscape? We were also wondering what the effect would be for commuters who were used to seeing an ad in the field and then one day saw something a bit different. And then, of course, there was the question of the season. If you painted it out in winter and it



stayed there a few months, at the turn of the season there's a sense in which your image would get stranded in time while the rest of the landscape changes. There is also the matter of the time of day. The facade is in full sun in the morning but would be silhouetted against a sunset on a clear evening. Another consideration cropped up when we made some mockups in Photoshop and showed them to a friend and he said it looked like a kind of NIMBYism; he was worried that there was an agenda here of painting it out; so it immediately seemed like we don't want these things, whereas our relationship to them was far more ambivalent. We then thought about what would happen if you do something else with it—what about camouflaging it with dazzle? But then all of a sudden it started to look like public art a little bit, and it just felt like the wrong sort of thing. Then there were some other sites, one of which was a trailer on the A12 that was partly in front of a bungalow: we thought of painting a grand conservatory onto the trailer so that, from the right angle, it appeared to be an extension on the back of the bungalow. But this brought up a new set of questions about demographics, and taste, which seemed like a different work: besides, that particular trailer site didn't fit with our narrative, because you can slow down to see it.

So we went back to the idea of painting it out. But there's this difficulty: you want to make a connection between the motorway and the place that it is passing through, and you want the work to amplify the 'noise' coming from their

relationship, but the purpose of the motorway is to do precisely the opposite—to disconnect. So there remains the question of how you get people to notice it. We have thought of designing a mobile phone app that would alert drivers to the proximity of a trailer as they approached it. Then they could look out for it in advance. The alert signals would consist of playful, humorous recordings of things we would prerecord, which would reflect on the histories of land ownership itself. That's why we're looking at various blogs and at the House of Lords debates—there are these threads as to what you can get for land; you can apparently get £500 a week if you have a strip by a railway and a long enough banner, but others are going for £55 a week...and about what happens if you can't rent it out or if someone blocks it? So there are all of these discussions going on, real estate speculators discussing the advantages of buying up land next to the new proposed high-speed rail link HS2—or, as I was saying earlier, the discussions about dangers between members of the House of Lords, these sounds of disgust, which we would record; and then perhaps fictional conversations between landlords and crown representatives for example, historical ones, following the enclosures act of the seventeenth century, or conversations between commoners, the rights to graze geese. There were various examples already of that kind of thing, and various poems that exist—we found this well-known one dating from the time of the enclosures:

They hung the man and flogged the woman
That stole the goose from off the common
But let the greater villain loose
That stole the common from off the goose.

— again this poem has to do with contesting how the land is apportioned and used, but perhaps more importantly in the present context, it would also seem to have to do with an attempt to transform work (in this case the act of enclosing the common) into its 'scene', so that it might become invisible.

Discussion

ROBIN MACKAY: Obviously the invention of this device to exploit a loophole in the law results in a change in the value of certain properties, these fields which had been cut off and now become valuable. I was wondering about the Google images and whether they maybe add a second level to this economy, namely if you could get your ad in one of these images where the Google vans went past. Because Google must know which sites people look at most on Streetview, so there's a potential second kind of virtual real estate there, which can be occupied by being in the real space at the right moment, but whose value may be more enduring.

NICK FERGUSON: That would be interesting. In fact they come by quite often: We found that the image we were using was taken last summer, and then we found another Google image, you get a Google van here and there's one you see from here, it's a different van, it's done repeatedly, so putting it within that line, yeah, that would be great.

RM: These sites create a kind of intersection between two different kinds of space. But it also seemed to me as if you could talk about two different types of temporality, a modern/postmodern versus a contemporary sensibility. You mentioned Ballard, and when asked to define the image of the twentieth century, Ballard says it's a man driving in a car on a motorway, forever. There's a certain sense of freedom and openness and utopianism in that Autobahn image which is very modernist, driving down a motorway, presumably with no traffic jams.... Then if we think about Marc Augé and the way he describes the space of the contemporary world, he describes it as an abstract mode of navigation through textual and diagrammatic instructions, which is far more what it's actually like to drive, or even, increasingly, to walk, in London for example: just a series of signs channelling you, telling you what to do, telling you what might happen, telling you what's coming up. It's that space into which these devices you're exploring are inserted: as the House of Lords discussion says, it's a part of another sort of phenomenological landscape, which involves textual

signs and semiotics. They seem to interestingly straddle those two landscapes, and therefore they don't necessarily fit into that other, if you like, more classical-modern notion of the motorway.

NF: Yes, I'm familiar with that Ballard inflection as well. You're right though, that the experience has moved on. I'd expected a more ambivalent treatment from Sinclair's *London Orbital*. But in fact it seems incredibly dated, even though it was made only about ten years ago. Sinclair did a book as well at around the same time. They are both really didactic. There was nothing romantic about this sense of freedom, this is just a really awful experience, so over the top as to how awful it was.... In fact it is a bit more complicated and troubling than just being straightforwardly awful. Sinclair knows that too, or he wouldn't write about it, but he doesn't put his finger on what is staged in these motorway structures—perhaps because he is too wedded to the past and too traumatized by them.

RM: I wonder, if you were just to put a massive arrow on one of these, whether that would be construed as being illegal, as being disruptive enough that they'd have to take action to remove it—you know, something that actually looked like it was part of that semiotic landscape.

ANDY WEIR: Or you could use the language of the speed limit signs.

TOM TREVATT: Increase the speed limit by one mile an hour.

RM: Or just a number, quite cryptic....

NF: Also, it's visible from the air, that's another way of thinking about it, which we haven't got our heads around yet.

RM: There's also a sort of peculiar analogy to where painting stops and sculpture begins there, because do you regard it as a structure or an image? As soon as you regard it as a structure then these laws apply to it, but in so far as it becomes an image, a different law applies to it; and, presumably, once it becomes a sign, yet another one.

NF: Well that's right, Richard, who's been quite interested in that, comes out of a painting tradition—you know, it's a painting.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm just wondering whether you are going to actually implement these plans.

NF We need to put the project together and try and get some funding. When I was talking about the question of scale, the idea is to put several on a single route, let's say the circle of the M25.

ROMAN VASSEUR: Do you have any ideas for funding?

NF: Well, it's curious, because we're not interested in it as a kind of guerilla art, although that's a fascinating thing—a piece of guerrilla art on something that's already a guerilla object. We're more interested in it being in a space that is publicly funded, otherwise you're dodging the interesting part of the issue, which is the relationship between what you're making and the institutional frameworks that are there to negotiate.

RV: This rule, this loophole that you've discovered, applies to billboards as well. There are temporary buildings in Cable Street in East London which have no planning permission whatsoever, but given the income they generate, they just anticipate that it would be too much effort for someone to make an appeal to get them out. So it's fairly credible for this operation.

But yes, there's something about Ballard, and you also mentioned Kraftwerk—Kraftwerk is a celebration of the autobahn, and the autobahn was designed to show off the German landscape to visitors, and they were empty at the time, whereas this seems to be much more Ballardian inasmuch as it's about the future being boring. But then it just seems to be begging a question about what goes on: between the image you've shown, between the dazzler and the trompe-l'œil operation, there seems to be a question that you're asking yourself about what constitutes content, or what constitutes meaning, in this whole operation. There's another Ballard story, isn't there, about a guy who sees that the signs are beaming things into this head, there's subliminal advertising going on; so he climbs up

one of these things one night to see if it's doing what he thinks it's doing. So it just seems to me that it requires another layer of intervention employed in it.

NF: I think the dazzle is something we wouldn't work with, we definitely decided not to. But I wanted to show how that would be a very different piece of work. I think the trompe-l'œil solution has all sorts of interesting things in its relationship to the framework of institutions and in relation to this idea of movement and permanence: with the Highways Agency, if they don't like it, what would they not like about it?! If they don't like trailers with distracting images on, would that be a way of negotiating the objections that they might make? And the Countryside Alliance, would they like them if they showed a view of the landscape?

RV: I'm sure that they would. But I don't know if it problematizes it.

NF: Well it brings attention, it's about bringing to public attention to a set of debates, the problem is already there.

LINDA STUPART: This happens in South Africa a lot as well, but it's quite interesting that these are often repurposed trucks which belong to farmers and which also do work, so it's very different to a standard billboard that just has this kind of non-function. People see it as quite strange to have this sign at the side of the road that you see all the time, and then you also see it delivering goods, for example, because that's what those trucks are normally used for. So it has multiple functions in the economy of material production and logistics. I don't know whether the ones you are showing us do move, or whether they have the capacity to move but don't. Why are they using trucks or trailers rather than a billboard? It seems that, if it's not going to move, building a billboard would be much cheaper.

NF: The reason is that to put up a billboard you need planning permission. Whereas with a truck you don't, because it's mobile. But I think that there are a variety of different ones, they're not all the same: some seem to be used for

a few months and then probably used again as a truck. Others seem to be there permanently.

LS: Are any of these used politically or for political parties? Remember when the end of the world was going to happen? The Rapture? There were all these signs about the Rapture coming, and then it didn't, and then all these signs obviously stayed after the Rapture because nobody had bothered to make any plans to take them down.

There was another one that I remember quite well in South Africa because it was quite amazing and a lot of these trucks were used: a charismatic church made a bunch of them and they had these strange warning signs—because they aren't legal or they aren't subjected to the same kinds of vetting or whatever, there's more of a possibility of using them in this way.

NF: We thought of renting one and then renting them out for other people to put things on, we went through that too, I think Nick Crowe said he would want to do one that said 'No Crash No Comp' because one of his friends was being sued at the time for one of those 'No Win No Fee' deals, and he was irate about it, and, you know, if they're dangerous, what would their relationship to that be?

RM: There's a real ambivalence here, if you were to try and think about that as a social project, hiring it and then opening it up to 'the people,' as a kind of democratic gesture. Because you've suggested that this exploit may already be a kind of claiming of the commons—that it's a ruse, operating by way of commerce, for clawing back what's been taken by ploughing these roads through the countryside, a way of benefiting from the fact that this land has become a useless pendant to these arteries.

NF: And getting whatever you can out of it.

RM: So would using it for art instead of commerce make it more or less moral?

NF: And publicly-funded art, that seems to me to an important part of it.

RV: Pro-hunting lobbies were also using them, which I thought was quite interesting, it was their land and they were using it to propagate their politics.

NF: We did mock up some where we wanted to see what happens if you put a little fox on this landscape, we painted a little fox into one, we were interested to see what it would look like. You could paint anything onto the landscape, for instance the one at Heathrow, you could paint protesters with banners.

JOHN CHILVER: How does the pricing compare with legitimate billboards?

NF: It's cheaper, it's much cheaper. So this one near Heathrow is one of the most expensive ones there is, it's £50 a day; but you'd be paying about £200 a day for the legitimate, illuminated billboards at Heathrow on the sliproad.

JC: I'm interested in the migration of advertising to the Internet and the evacuation of real-world advertising. I spend quite a lot of time photographing billboards, and it seems to me that they've become very boring over the last few years and that the corollary of advertising migrating to the Internet is that a lot of advertising on billboards relates to products that connect to the Internet.

NF: Pointing to another space.

JM: Or a website address.

JC: I'm wondering how many of these advertisements relate to the site, how many of them are pointing to somewhere else.

NF: The one that's on there now is local to the site, it's advertising the Heathrow Hilton; and at Christmas there was one that was advertising some turkey farm that's nearby.

RV: That seems to be a poignant thing. Matthew Lewis used to collect local advertising like parish magazine adverts or local press adverts and put them out, and I always thought there was something interesting about this peculiar mashup

of advertising forms that is absolutely local. And because advertising revenues have gone down across the board, magazines and elsewhere...we used to go to the cinema and there would be slides advertising the Indian restaurant 200 yards up the road, and it had been the same slide for twenty years, the middle of it had been burnt out. There was something very strange and handmade about this.

The most peculiar thing I ever saw was, do you remember the Benetton ads that had a torn-up animal in them? There's a tiny village in North Cornwall we were camping in, and you went round a tiny bend of road at about fifteen miles an hour, and the whole side of this road was that Benetton ad. And there's only about fifty houses in the village—it's like someone had put it there without doing their demographics, they just said, one of these Benetton ads need to go into this area, it's just incredible. Whereas if you put a modernist building there, people would be up in arms. So there's an alarming degree to which advertising can get away with those sorts of things because they are seen as temporal. I discussed making a mural quite often on our estate and I tried to cut down a billboard poster which I knew was illegal and local kids were really upset, because there's this commercialism....

NF: If you put an event on it and it has a date, then it's legal. You can put anything up if you put a date on it. So if you say, I don't know, 'Jumble Sale coming up this Saturday', you can do that. Maybe we need to go back to thinking about deep time....

LS: That advert was probably put there though so that somebody could take a photograph of that advert there, which could then be used as a better Benetton ad somewhere else. That's how they work—look at this, we produced this advert and then we put it in that landscape in which it is incongruous and then we photographed it in that landscape and then we put it in a landscape in London so there's this, I think, very strange site, relating to the difference between non-site and sitelessness...

NF: Dara Birnbaum makes a very clear correlation between TV and what is considered a shared landscape, it's totally Ballardian as well. This is the odd nature of these sites: you can see them, walk in them, you have to stop the car

and get out, but they're visually experienced alone by you, so they are yours... and the positioning of these billboards polarizes that, so that's the odd nature of commercialism...

LS: Also in terms of site and advertising and this strange nostalgia for things in the cinema telling you to go to places close to the cinema, if you actually want that, you just have to look at your iPad or your phone or your Gmail account: every single piece of equipment that you use focuses very particularly on where you are physically, because it knows exactly where you are, but it also knows what your interests are because of reading all of your emails and so on.

RM: But that's directing you from the local to the local through the mediation of the global, which is a different thing.

LS: Sure, but I think any kind of advertising that relies on a physical object, or is bound within a specific site that can't change constantly, is in itself quite a remarkable thing. Because this is no longer how we experience advertising most of the time, even if we experience it constantly in a very particular, maybe not local, but certainly individualistic, particular kind of site-specific way. Like if I'm standing in Hampstead Heath I can find people to have sex with, I can find a coffee shop to go to, I can find any of these things instantaneously. Grindr is an amazing example of how this technology is being used in terms of site, because it does actually tell you who to go and have sex with based on where you are standing, it's a remarkable idea of locality and advertising and corporeality and individualism and experience.

RM: Where is the site? Is the site your actual physical location, or is the site you're in really the app, with your physical location as a variable?

LS: It requires at least two actual bodies to be able to function, so it's not like another set of localities.

RM: And yet the social space in which you connect to other people is not physical space, that space or place is distributed elsewhere. It just happens to process parameters of physical space. It's a social space which can take physical location

as a parameter in order to facilitate corporeal activities...but that social space itself doesn't exist physically.

LS: Yes, it's a strange causal relationship.

JON MEYER: It does seem like all of the funny little bylaws about what you can do with different pieces of land must cover these structures, because there are very specific and very English kinds of rules around countryside and what farms are allowed to do. And they'll vary from region to region. They are very much the product of these expropriations, there may well be public that pass through these places, but there are reasons why the farmers have done this. It seems to me that there's a whole backstory that wants to come into this, and just treating it as another neutral surface for a projection somehow ignores the legal structure and the social structure that's created it. That's what I'm interested in, how that comes into the work. I mean, we've even just accepted that the land is of no use now, but it's clearly useful to whoever is occupying it; the rabbits ...it's not dead space, it's got living creatures there, but we all accept that it's supposed to somehow be utilised. So you're questioning some terms of utility, but accepting other terms of utility, and that seems to be something that these pieces of land seem to be negotiating. I wonder how that influences the work?

RM: Commercialism actually seems a pleasing riposte to the romanticism in regard to these kinds of spaces as well. I mean, you could imagine a certain type of artist who would be delighted to 'celebrate' these empty fields that are forgotten and desolate and have fallen into disuse. Once you put the advert in it, it becomes a far more dynamic type of site or non-site than this sorry, lost ruin of a no-place.

NF: Yeah, I'm not treating it as dead space, nor as just a surface on which to project something. One of the things we backed off doing was precisely that, so I mean the non-projection of something was hopefully a kind of paradoxical way of drawing attention to that. But, you're right, how does one bring that into the work, that's the question.

RV: You know Daniel Buren's work, the New York piece that's half in the gallery, and goes half out of the window, half in the street? There seems to be a real shift in that work where it's in conversation with its environment and then it becomes its environment, it's almost synonymous with the shift of things outside the institution and then becoming the institution. Isn't there that danger with your project once it becomes publicly funded? That it's simply a way for a public institution to take over what is otherwise a moral cleansing of a place?

NF: I think that can be true about public art, yeah.

RV: I mean this is what public art tends to do—this house is now clean because it's art.

RM: But that could be interesting in the context of a site whose aesthetic and commercial hygiene is already debatable and complex....

